Extension Service Circular 161 July, 1931

Educational Values in 4-H Club Work

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EDUCATIONAL VALUES IN 4-H CLUB WORK

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This is the third of a series of studies concerning educational values in 4-H club work. The study is based on information assembled from about 150 parents of club members distributed in 35 States in different sections of the country. The names of these parents were furnished by the State leaders of 4-H club work in the States which participated in this study.

Extension Service Circular 128 was the first of this series of studies. The data used therein were obtained from 184 State and county club agents, and county agricultural and home demonstration agents of the 35 States cooperating in the studies. Extension Service Circular 147 was the second of this series of studies. The data used in that circular came from about 200 present and former club members in the same group of States.

The data used in this study are supplemented with considerable information obtained from personal interviews by the author with groups of parents whose children were at the time of the interviews or had been previously connected with club work. Those supplying this information were men and women who lived on the farm and were actively engaged in farming as a means of livelihood. The number participating in this study is not large, but the individuals came from representative areas. It is therefore believed that these data should be useful in helping to evaluate the influence of club activities on farm boys and girls. If club work exerts worth-while influences in changing the attitudes and ideals of its members, it seems obvious that the parents of these boys and girls should be among the first to observe the change.

Like the other two of this series of studies, this is a subjective method of measuring the effect of club work and its apparent influence on farm youth. The content of this study is based on personal opinions of a relatively small number of persons. The boys and girls concerned had been connected with club work for an average of more than four and a half years. To measure objectively the effect of a system of instruction or of a kind of training on individuals is not always practicable. It is clear therefore that personal judgment or individual opinion is often our best and only way of pointing out certain tangible results in many kinds of worthy endeavor.

DISTRIBUTION: One copy of this circular has been sent to each State extension director, State and assistant State club leader, county and assistant county club agent, State agricultural-college library, and State experiment-station library.

In the limited number of personal interviews the author has had with parents of club boys and girls, certain factors stand out rather prominently. Parents always expressed a great deal of satisfaction in the achievements of their boys and girls in 4-H club work. The majority of them praised it highly and were enthusiastic about the advantages club work offers. The information set forth in this study can be taken as reflecting the attitudes of this group of parents toward club work and whatever values the work may have, as they see it, in stimulating the interest of boys and girls in farm life, or in training them for greater service in the different vocations they may choose to follow, as the conclusions reached will be determined mainly by the replies to specific questions. The replies to these questions are indicated in most instances in graphs in terms of percentages.

One criticism sometimes made against club work is, that so many boys and girls abandon the work after one or two years. Data developed in other studies have shown that the average time spent in club work is around one and three-fourth years. There can be no argument that this period of time is far too short for the best results. It is obvious that the number of years spent in club work should have a great deal to do with the benefits boys and girls derive from the instruction offered. Other things being equal, those who remain in club work for periods of two, three, or four years, or longer, have far greater opportunity for worth-while achievement than those who are in club work for a year or less. The length of time in club work also makes it easier for parents to observe desirable changes in ideals and attitudes that boys and girls may develop as a result of their instruction in club activities. For these and other reasons it seemed expedient to select a group of parents whose children had been club members longer than the average. The opinions expressed by these parents with reference to the questions asked are set out in the pages to follow. The first question in this study was to determine how long these boys and girls had been engaged in club work.

(1) Number of years spent in club work?

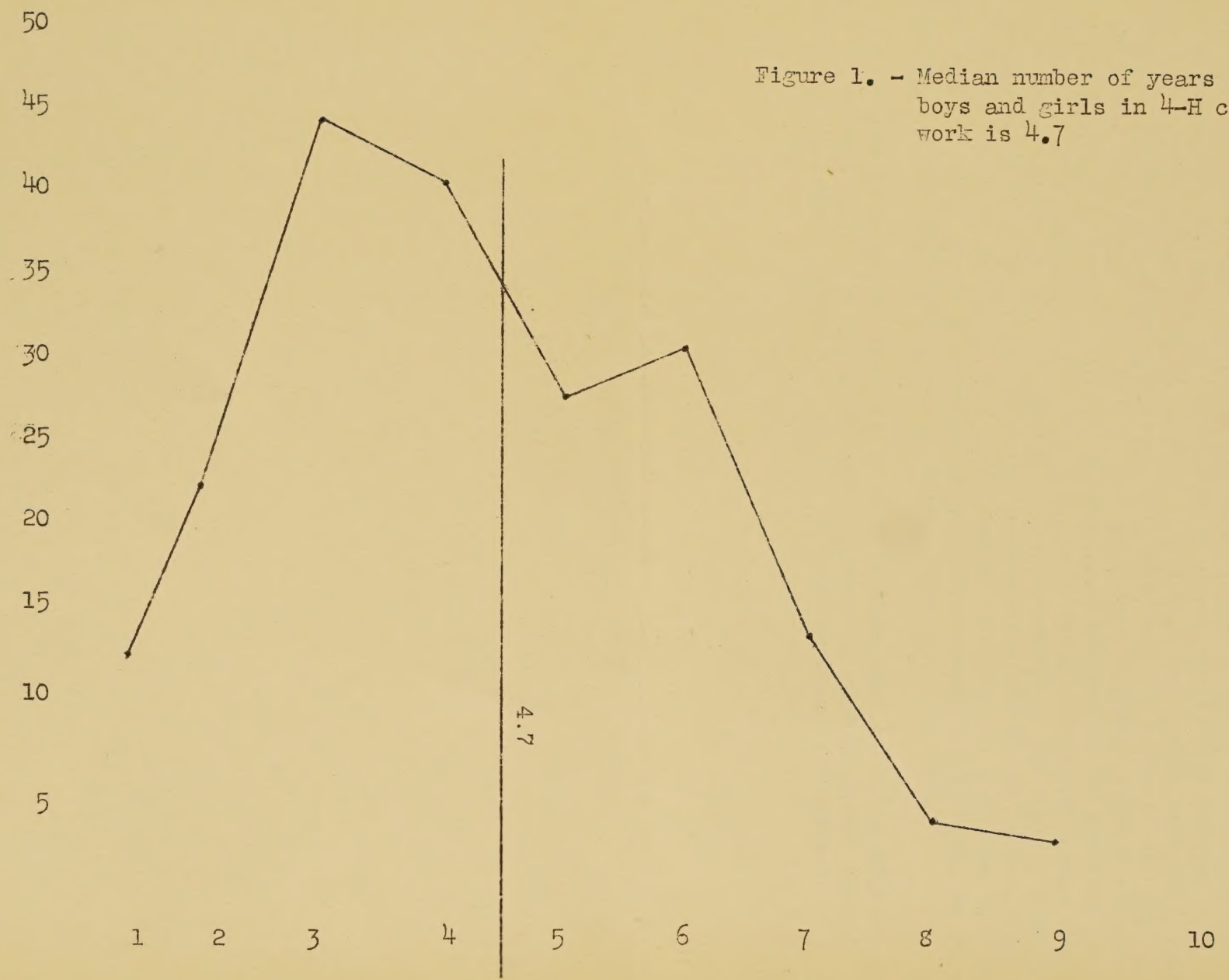

Figure 1. - Median number of years of 199 boys and girls in 4-H club work is 4.7

The foregoing graph indicates that this group of boys and girls was above the average in the number of years spent as club members. In all of the values club work has to offer, whether economic, social, or purely educational, the big advantage favors the boy or girl who is determined to stay in the work long enough to test its helpfulness. The boy or girl who remains in club work for five, six, or seven years will have a great advantage, other things being equal, in the accumulation of property and in the winning of prizes, and other rewards. It is possible that boys and girls remain in club work longer because of prizes and trips they win. In a purely social way, boys and girls with longer service in club work will develop a wider acquaintance through trips to county, State, and national meetings. In addition to the technical training acquired in agriculture or home economics, these trips also have many values of an educational nature, providing, of course, that the club member is able to win some of these trips as the result of outstanding achievement. Records indicate that club members are remaining in the work for a longer period. This is an indication of progress. Everything should be done to encourage worthy boys and girls to remain longer in club work.

In the next question, parents of club members were asked to check any or all of several ways through which participation in club work has seemed to affect the interest of the boy or girl in farm or home improvement.

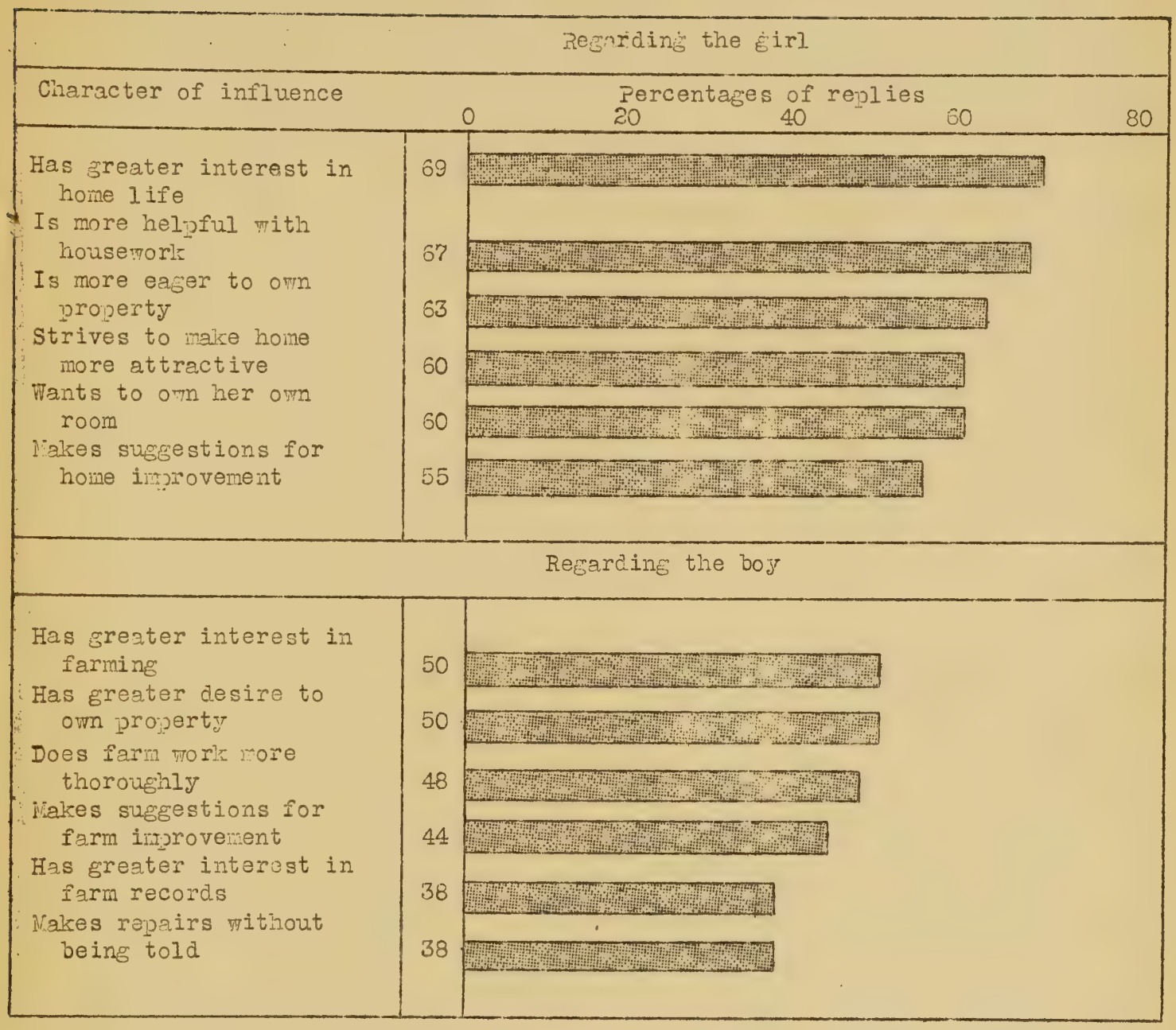

Figure 2.- How club activities appear to affect the interest of boys and girls

The preceding chart lists certain helpful influences of club work on farm boys and girls as their parents see it. Collectively some of the more important influences are: Greater interest in farming and in home life; more willing to help with home work and in improving the farm. The desire for ownership is stimulated. Taking these data as criteria, it seems apparent that club work tends to stimulate in young people greater pride in farm and home life and deeper interest in helping to improve their own surroundings. Obviously, it might be expected that as farm boys and girls advance in age most of them become more deeply interested in activities of the farm or the home.

(2) Does club work provide useful training for farming or home making?

The content of the returns to this question indicate clearly that these parents believe that club work offers opportunity for very helpful training along these lines. Not all of the number reported on this particular question, but of those who did, 92 per cent reported in the affirmative. When it is recognized that one of the principal aims of club work is to teach boys and girls modern scientific methods in farming and farm home making, the replies to this question become even more significant. It is generally recognized that some of the best achievements made by the extension service in the improvement of agriculture and country life with adults have come about through the demonstrations which have been carried out through boys' and girls' club activities.

(3) Has club work influenced your boy or girl in a choice of a life work?

In studying the scope and content of 4-H club programs throughout a year, one is impressed with the fact that there are many activities in club work that contribute to both educational and vocational guidance of youth. Broadly considered, club work may be said to have several objectives, among them being (1) to help to improve conditions on farms and in farm homes to the end that living standards may be raised and a more wholesome farm life established; (2) to give farm boys and girls a chance to use the influences in their environment for personal improvement; and (3) to stimulate greater interest in the importance of a happy prosperous, and contented farm citizenry to our national welfare. Obviously, there might be mentioned other worthy objectives of club work but these are among the important ones.

It would not be accurate to say that the sole aim of club work is to prepare for farming or farm home making, or to try to influence farm youth to choose a career in farming when their interest and talents lead to other fields of endeavor. It is true, however, that the majority of farm youth throughout the land will continue to remain on the farm and earn their living from the soil. As club work emphasizes and teaches the importance of better training for farming and that the adoption of the best practices is essential to success, such training will and should result in helping to prepare those who wish to farm for a more efficient existence.

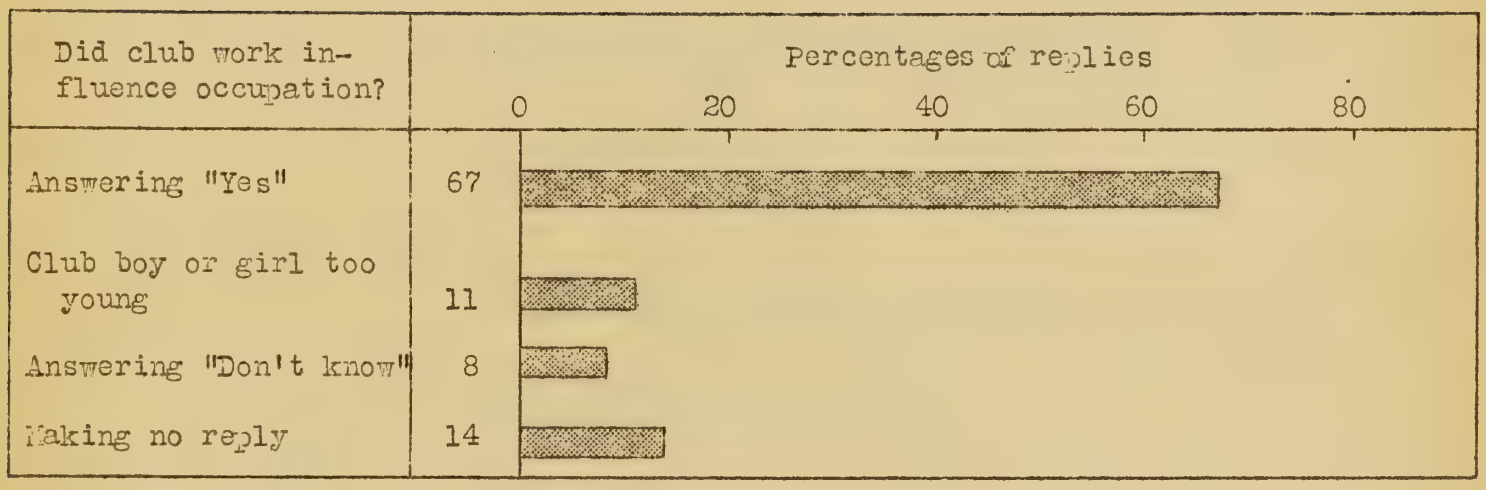

Figure 3. - Influence of club work on choice of occupation

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(4) Educational value club work has in stimulating the interest and ambitions of farm boys and girls.

Returns here reveal that this group of parents believes training in club work has considerable value in stimulating boys and girls to higher endeavor along general educational lines. In their judgment, club members are stimulated to read more, to remain in school longer, and to maintain greater interest in school work. They feel also that through contacts made in club work, boys and girls are inspired to go to college. There are evidences to show that club work gives boys and girls a broader outlook on life along with a greater interest in local, State, and national affairs. All of these are indicated by the tabulations in Figure 4.

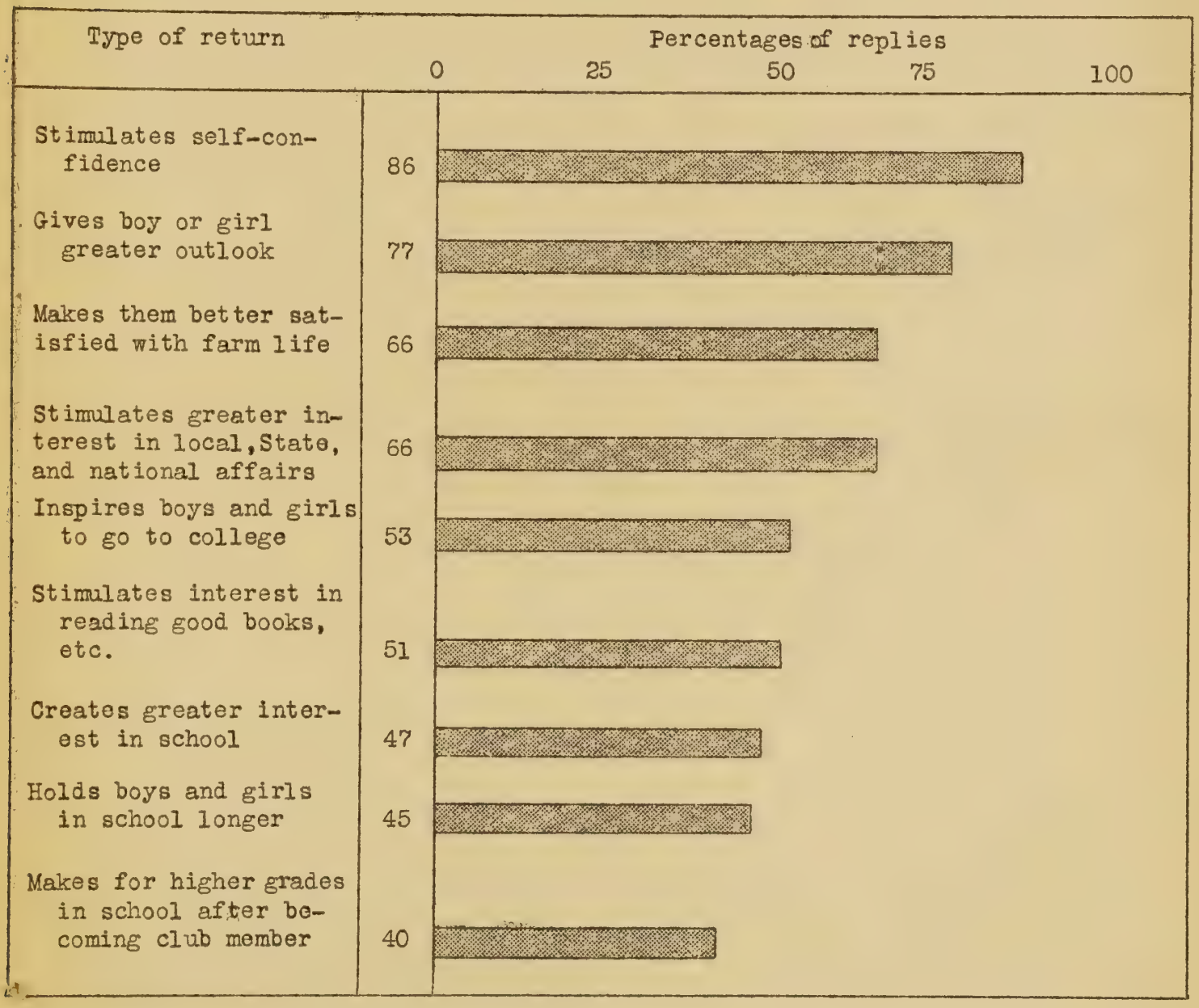

Figure 4. - Educational values of club work in inspiring boys and girls

In a properly balanced program of club work there are certain things which stand out as having more importance than others. Perhaps no two individuals would place equal value on the same thing. In this question parents were requested to check certain things about club work which had had the greatest influence on their boys and girls. An analysis of these opinions discloses that the personal element is outstanding in influencing boys and girls. Contact with leaders, winning prizes, attending fairs, and judging contests are among those activities that stand at the top of the list.

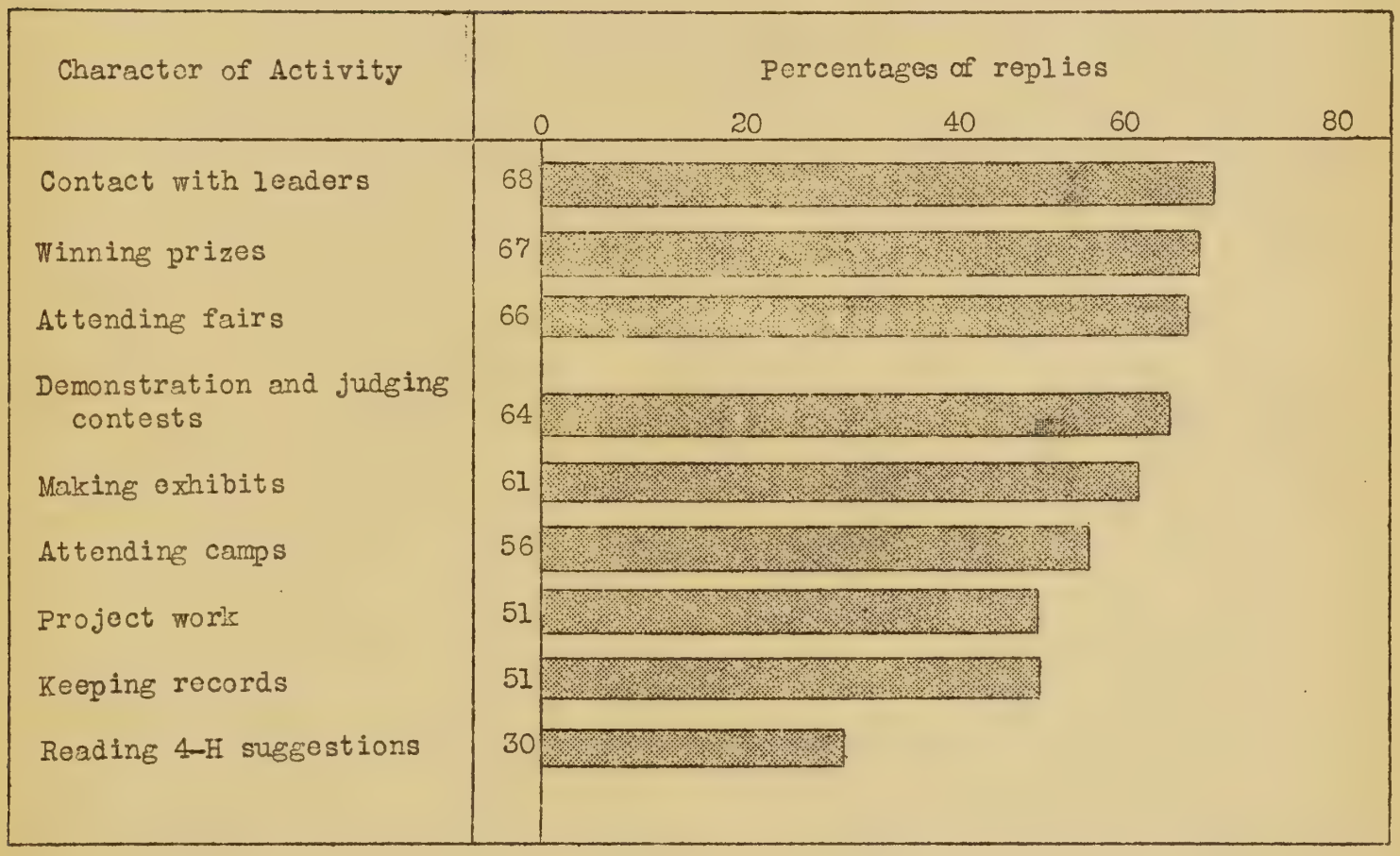

Figure 5. - Activities of club work that have had the greatest influence on boys and girls

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(5) Traits that club work has helped to develop in boys and girls.

In carrying on the different activities essential to success in a well-ordered club project, there are certain traits, such as interest, ambition, judgment, adaptability, determination, courtesy, honesty, thrift, and loyalty, which ordinarily manifest themselves in one way or another. These and a number of other traits were listed, and parents were asked to check those which club work had helped to develop. Many or all of these traits might have been developed had the boys or girls not come in contact with club work, as some other agency might have provided the necessary opportunity. This study makes no attempt to answer this question. These data tell only what parents themselves have to say about the influence of club work in the development of these traits.

These traits are indicated in the order of their frequency in Figure 6.

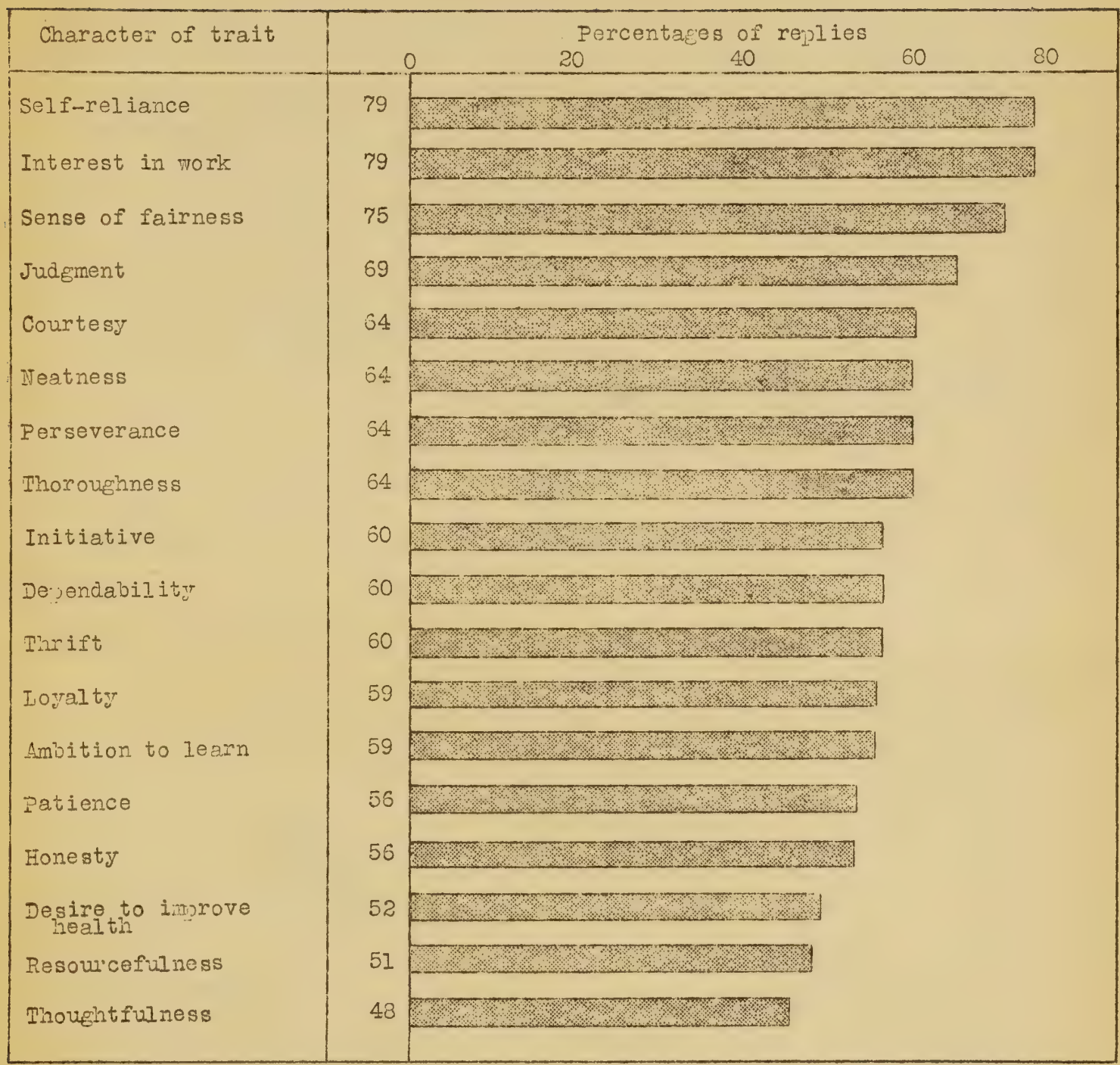

Figure 6. - Traits that club work has helped your boy or girl to develop

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(6) Has 4-H club work stimulated your boys and girls to take part in community activities?

A well-organized 4-H club program extends its activities into a wide range of interests of importance to a community. While the club program is concerned mainly with problems and projects in farm and home improvement in which boys and girls themselves have a personal interest, many of the activities are concerned equally with social, recreational, and health aspects of the community in which a 4-H club is functioning. This situation is as it should be, because in the broad sense, club work aims to develop boys and girls not only through a better knowledge of the problems of the farm and home and how to be more prosperous, but in the knowledge of how to live a richer and fuller life. Figure 7 shows the report on this question.

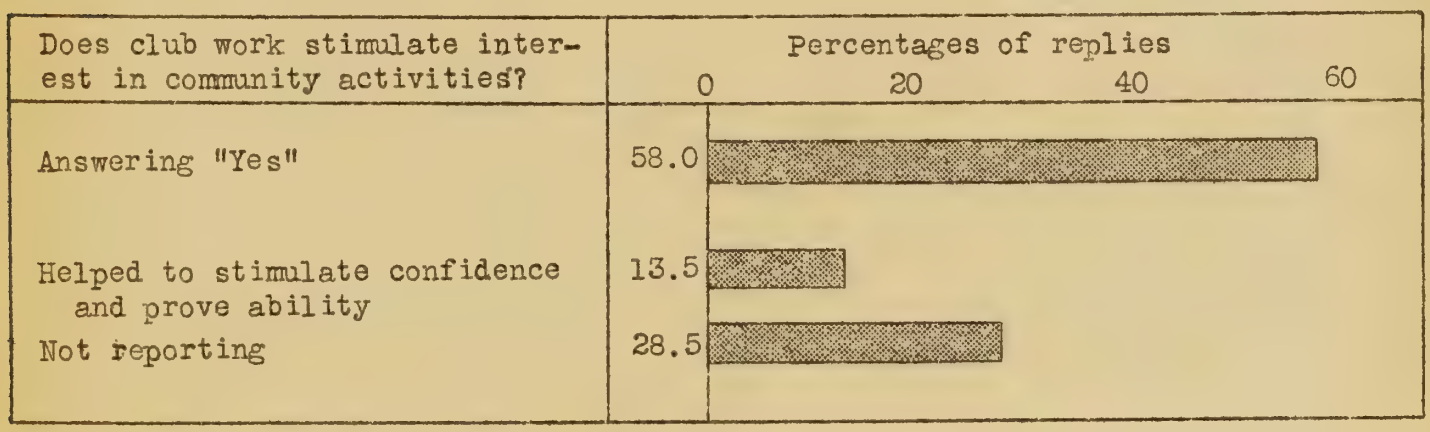


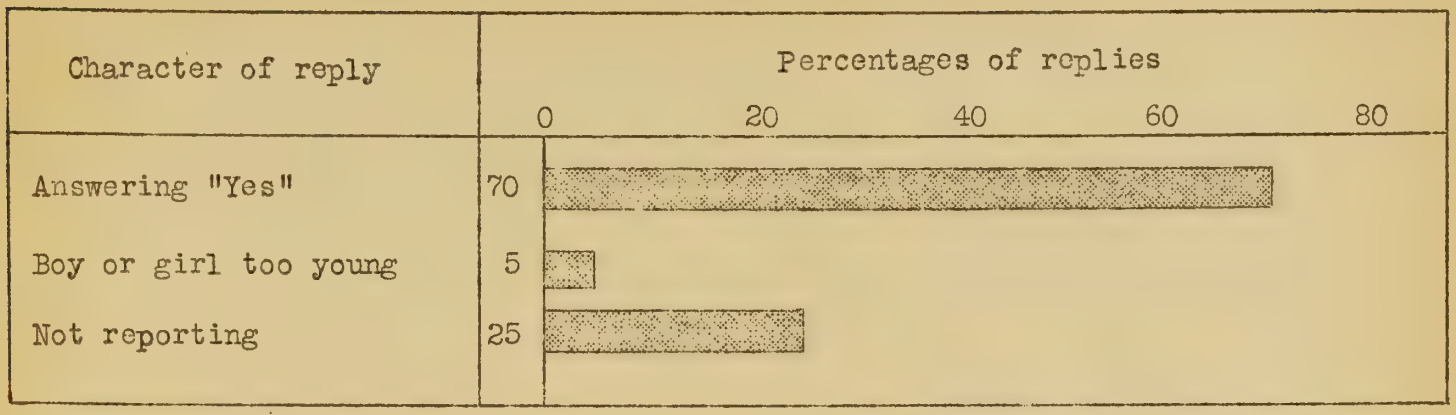
Figure 7. - Has club work stimulated your boy or girl to take active part in community activities?

The following statements indicate the attitudes of certain parents toward this question: "Our daughter became local leader and later worked as a county club agent in the State." "Through their training in club work boys and girls are able to put on programs before the local grange, and other farmers' meetings, which are a great help to the community." "My daughter feels a real responsibility in community activities and is always ready to do all she can." "Club work has caused them to be more anxious to make their community better and to get other boys and girls into club work."

(7) To what extent has club work helped your boy or girl to become a community leader?

Leadership in any phase of activity is only a relative term. There is no standard for measuring the requirements for leadership. There are different kinds of leadership work. Obviously certain kinds of activity offer opportunity for leadership development, and individual participation in certain activities tends to develop leadership qualities. That 4-H club work tends to develop certain qualities of leadership in farm boys and girls is evident from the content of these replies. They indicate how parents of 4-H club members feel about the value of club work in training boys and girls for community leadership.

Figure 8. - Has club work trained your boy or girl to become a leader in your community?



(8) Has club work helped to influence your boy or girl in earning money and starting a savings account?

A considerable number of very significant statements are given to show how club work has influenced boys and girls in saving the proceeds of their projects. There are a number of ways through which club members can earn money, but the greatest opportunity probably lies in the accumulation of property through animal projects. A dairy animal, a sow and pigs, or a poultry flock, when selected as a project and properly managed increases in value. It is true also that money is earned in club work by those who win through contests of different kinds. These funds are often put to good use, as is indicated in the following statements by parents telling what they think of the value of club work in stimulating thrift: "All three children are saving their money earned in club work to pay their college expenses." "My boy had $400 when he started to college, made through club work." "My children own $6,000 worth of cattle, sheep, and poultry in addition to their bank accounts." "My boy would never have thought of earning money to buy his pigs with unless required by the club. He has also kept a savings account." "My daughter has nearly $200 in the bank, earned from selling vegetables from her club garden. She also has a cow that was started in calf club." "Money earned has been used for high-school work by our girls." "Boys and girls both have saving accounts and checking accounts which were started through their club experience." No doubt the foregoing are rather outstanding achievements among club members, but even so they show the possibilities of the work to the energetic, deserving, and farsighted farm boy or girl.

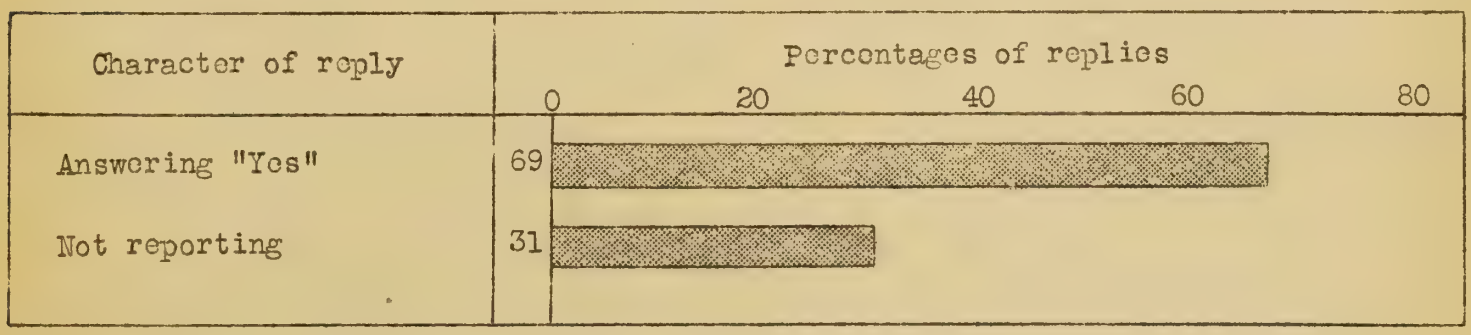


Figure 9. - Has club work helped to interest your boy or girl in earning money and starting a savings account?

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(9) Some objectionable features about club work.

Even in the best-organized club program, the instruction offered by the club, county, or home demonstration agent is more or less loosely organized and supervised. The county extension worker is unable to reach club members daily. Obviously the club boy or girl with such help as they can obtain from a good local leader must depend to a large degree upon his or her own initiative and judgment in carrying on their club project. The purpose of this question was to find out, if possible, some things about what parents think of the weak places in club work. So they were requested to check certain things which they considered objectionable features.

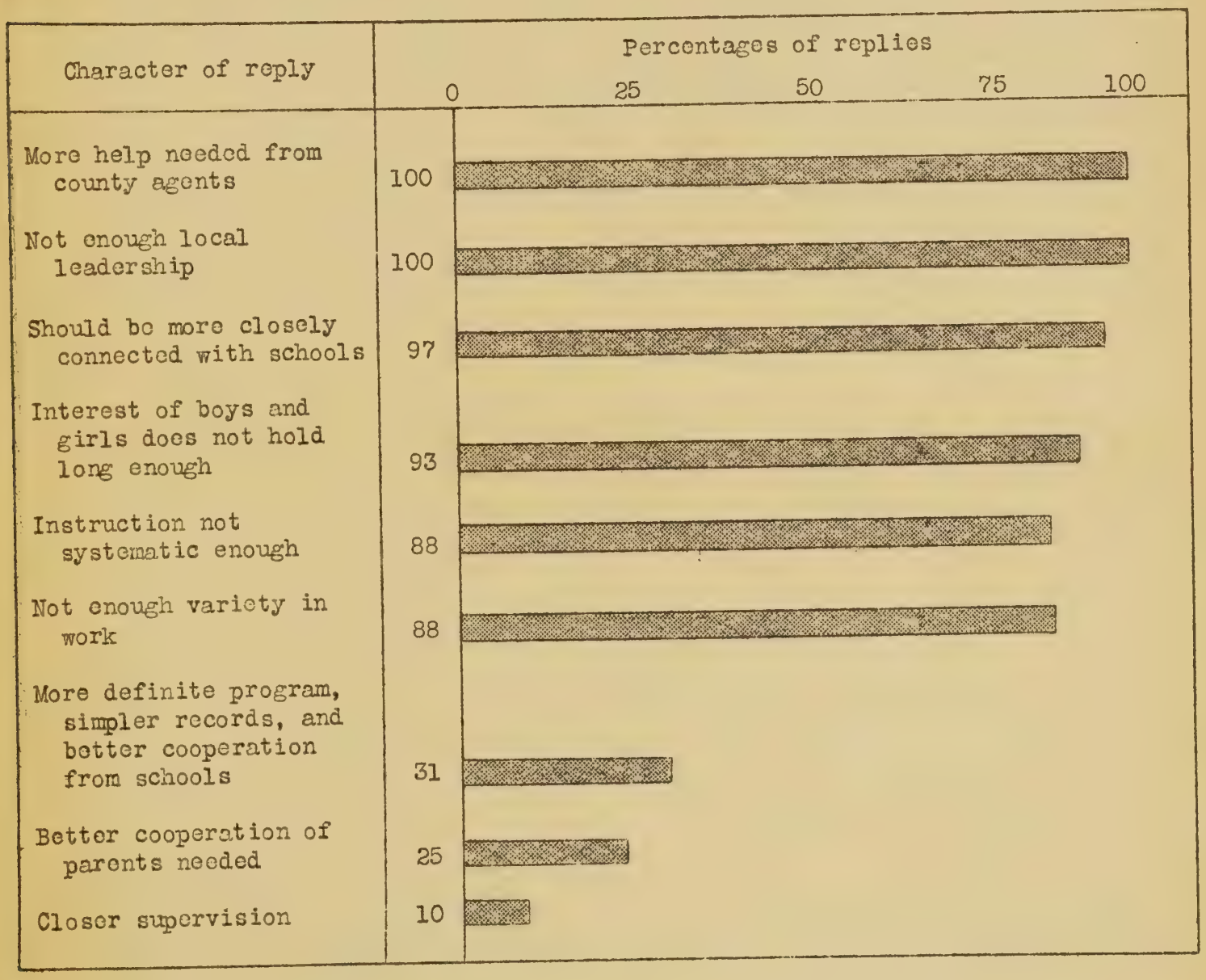

Figure 10. - Objectionable features about club work

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Figure 10 shows that the parents contributing to this study have certain convictions as to the possible ways of strengthening 4-H club work. No claim is made that club work as now organized is conducted in systematic order. The instruction offered is in more or less unorganized form. Whether this is a serious criticism or not, the situation is one that is not easily corrected, due to the fact that county agents find it practically impossible to make frequent visits to the homes of club members. Especially is this true in counties that do not have special club agents.

More systematic instruction would doubtless help to strengthen the club program and incidentally cause the interest in club work to hold longer. According to Figure 10 it is evident that parents feel the need of something to stimulate club boys and girls to remain longer in the work. More help from county agents with more and better local leadership seem to be two of the greatest needs of club work. A more varied program and closer cooperation with schools are two quite noticeable weaknesses in the present club program in the judgment of this group of parents. These weaknesses are generally recognized by the leaders of club work in the several States. Efforts have been made in a number of States to correct them and some progress has been noted. In recent years county agents have been encouraged to give a fair proportion of their time to club work, and greater stress has been placed on the importance of better and more systematic training for local leaders. Club work has improved considerably in recent years. There has been some noticeable improvement also in the length of time boys and girls remain in the work.

The fact that the success of club work depends largely upon effective local leadership is well recognized. In these returns it is evident also that many parents feel that local leadership is very important in club work. It is generally agreed that its success depends to a considerable extent upon the interest and cooperation that parents manifest toward the work. Some feel that club work could be made more effective if the schools would cooperate more fully, although data collected in another study of this series* indicate beyond question that there is very close cooperation, in a large number of States, between club work and teachers. There are some parents in this group who believe that the older club members and the younger members should be segregated, and that competition between the younger and the older boys and girls should be avoided. A few others feel that club work should be under a special agent, well trained for the job, interested in boys and girls and devoted to this kind of work. Such changes as these would no doubt contribute greatly to the effectiveness of club work.

(10) Do you believe that club work is worth while for every ambitious farm boy or girl? If so, why?

In response to this question, 99 per cent answered in the affirmative. The character of the returns is such as to indicate beyond any doubt that this group of parents of club members believes that training obtained through 4-H club work has great value for rural boys and girls. The general feeling is that club work offers opportunities that are not offered in any other type of organization, that it gives boys and girls a higher opinion of farm

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* Extension Service Circular 128. Educational values in 4-H club work. E. H. Shinn. July, 1930.

life, and that it has value in keeping boys and girls on the farm. There is also the opinion that club work teaches club members how to cooperate and work together, and by this means many learn to become leaders of groups. Responsibility and sportsmanship are two factors which club work tends to develop in boys and girls, according to this group of parents. There are of course many other advantages mentioned. The following are some statements from parents regarding their opinions of club work: "From experience in my own family and from contact with young people at fairs and camps, I know there is an inspiration in 4-H club work which can not be supplied in another way." "Club training gives a broader outlook on life, inspiration for higher education, keeps boys and girls on the farm, or at least makes them able to appreciate the true value of farm life." "Four-H club work teaches that modern practices are essential to modern farming and home making." "Club work gives boys and girls higher ideals, higher living standards, teaches them to be happy and to make the best of what they have, and to be unselfish in their living." There are many other comments similar to these which could be quoted. However, these are ample to indicate why parents feel that club work offers opportunities to ambitious farm boys and girls to develop themselves intellectually, physically, and socially through participation in a wide range of activities of importance in the improvement of farm, home, and community life.

SUMMARY

The content of this survey records some rather significant facts relative to the attitudes of parents of boys and girls regarding educational values of 4-H club work. These returns have been received from about 150 parents whose children were club members. The 30 odd States represented in this study are widely distributed and representative of the country. If these returns can be taken as a criterion for estimating the attitudes of parents of 800,000 club boys and girls throughout the land, there can be no question as to the way parents feel toward club work. This small group of parents feels that the training boys and girls receive in club work is most useful and helpful in the development of skills and knowledge of farm and home life, and in stimulating the interest of boys and girls to greater endeavor.

The content of this series of studies, therefore, comes from groups of people who are directly interested in farm youth and in the achievements of 4-H club programs. It is believed that these findings are significant and should have some value to those engaged in formulating club programs. If those responsible for building club programs read these suggestions seriously, they should find in them many ideas as to ways of inspiring club work to function more fully in developing farm boys and girls and of improving country life. These findings should be convincing also to those who may have maintained a more or less critical attitude toward club work, due perhaps to insufficient knowledge of what constitutes a good club program or of what club work proposes to accomplish.

In summing up the results of this survey attention is called to the following:

I. The group of club members whose parents responded to this inquiry remained in club work much longer than the average. These returns show that the average number of years in club work was 4.7.

II. Participation in club work seems to have tremendous influence in stimulating the interest of boys and girls in farming and home life on the farm.

III. Ninety-two per cent reported that club work offers very definite training for farming and home making, and 67 per cent said that club work has value in helping boys and girls to choose a life work.

IV. Some educational values boys and girls derive from club work are: Greater self-confidence, more interest in local, State, and national affairs, desire to go to college, interest in reading good books, desire to remain in school longer, and stimulation of scholarship.

V. Club activities that have had the greatest influence on boys and girls are: Contact with leaders, winning prizes, attending fairs, demonstrating and judging, exhibits, camps, project work, and records.

VI. Some of the leading traits club work helps to develop are: Self-reliance, interest in work, sense of fairness, judgment, courtesy, neatness, thoroughness, perseverance, initiative, dependability, thrift, loyalty, ambition to learn, and honesty.

VII. More than 50 per cent reported that club work stimulates boys and girls to take part in community activities, and 70 per cent reported that club work trains for leadership.

VIII. Sixty-nine per cent reported that club work helps to develop thrift habits.

IX. On suggestions for improving club work the following stand out: More help needed from county agents, reported by all; not enough local leaders, reported by all; should be more closely connected with schools, reported by 97 per cent; interest of boys and girls does not hold long enough, reported by 93 per cent; instruction not systematic enough, reported by 88 per cent; not enough variety, reported by 88 per cent; better cooperation of parents, reported by 25 per cent.

X. Ninety-nine per cent reported that club work has educational value for ambitious farm boys and girls.

This circular concludes the series of three studies of educational values in 4-H club work.

The data used in these studies were obtained from State and county club leaders, from present and former club members, and from parents of boys and girls who had been 4-H club members.

In a broad way the questions asked these three groups are related to the social, economic, and educational values in club work. These data should have considerable value in the further promotion of a national system of extension work for rural youth. The type of leadership is certainly of primary importance in the development of club work. If club leaders have well-defined aims or objectives and a vision of the possibilities of extension work with farm youth, and training ample to reach the objectives, there can be little doubt of the outcome. The first of this series of studies tells a great deal about the aims of leaders in club work. How well defined these aims are these studies make no attempt to say. It is the opinion of the author, however, that these data have some value, and that they should be carefully analyzed and studied by those extension workers interested in 4-H club work. From these data can be gleaned some timely suggestions, which, if adequately interpreted and effectively put into operation, will have far-reaching influences in the general improvement of farm life, and in the development of farm boys and girls to a fuller appreciation and anjoyment of their environment.